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SENATE RESOLUTION

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WHEREAS, The members of the Illinois Senate are saddened to learn of the death of Hester Barbara Nelson Suggs, who passed away on October 2, 2016; and

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WHEREAS, Hester Suggs was born on April 30, 1928 in Champaign; her parents were Cecil D. and Carrie Nelson; she married Raymond Eugene Suggs in June of 1948; and

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WHEREAS, Hester Suggs attended Gregory Elementary School and Champaign Junior High; in 1945, she graduated from Champaign High School, where she was active in the Girls Athletic Association, the Glee Club, and the Vocalettes; she entered the University of Illinois in the fall of 1945; and

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WHEREAS, Hester Suggs led a life committed to providing exemplary education to children for over 30 years and service to the Champaign-Urbana community; in the late 1940s, she served as a teacher in the Douglass Center Kindergarten Association, an independent, community-based organization that provided early childhood education for African-American children in Champaign-Urbana during the time of a segregated school system; in the early 1950s, she concentrated on raising her family and assisting her husband with his plastering and photography businesses; and

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1 WHEREAS, In 1961, Hester Suggs resumed her career as an
2 educator, serving as the afternoon kindergarten teacher at
3 Booker T. Washington School; after earning her bachelor's
4 degree in elementary education from the University of Illinois
5 at Urbana-Champaign in 1963, she completed her student teaching
6 at Leal Elementary School in Urbana, where she was later
7 employed; after earning her master's degree in elementary
8 education at the University of Illinois in 1967, she joined
9 Champaign School District Unit 4 as a fifth grade teacher at
10 Dr. Howard School; with the establishment of Project
11 Creativity, the gifted program in Unit 4, she was designated as
12 the teacher for gifted fifth grade students; her expertise was
13 soon recognized and she served as a demonstration teacher for
14 the Illinois State Board of Education, spending weekends
15 conducting workshops in the area of gifted education for
16 teachers across east central Illinois; and

17 WHEREAS, In 1971, Hester Suggs was selected as the
18 principal of Booker T. Washington Elementary School in
19 Champaign Unit 4; the school was established as a magnet
20 program in partnership with the University of Illinois in the
21 desegregation plan for Champaign schools; in collaboration
22 with her staff, she created an innovative humanities and
23 arts-based curriculum attracting students from all over the
24 community; in 1980, she successfully secured a grant from the

1 United States Department of Education to establish programs
2 emphasizing foreign languages, music, cultural and performing
3 arts, and interpretive thinking for children in kindergarten
4 through fifth grade; the school hosted several
5 artist-in-residence programs for dance, established an art
6 design lab and foreign program, and earned a reputation as a
7 premier magnet program and elementary education organization,
8 pioneering a multi-disciplinary approach to learning; she
9 retired from the school in 1993 after 22 years of service; and

10 WHEREAS, Following her retirement, Hester Suggs continued
11 her community service volunteering with the local Illinois
12 Retired Teachers Association and serving as a member of the
13 Champaign County African-American History Committee; she was a
14 lifelong member of Bethel AME Church of Champaign and was at
15 one time a member of the Helping Hand Club and the choir; and

16 WHEREAS, In 1988, Hester Suggs received the Service
17 Recognition Award for Administrators from the Illinois
18 Alliance for Arts in Education recognizing her exemplary work
19 in developing an arts and humanities-based curriculum that
20 enhanced student academic performance at Booker T. Washington
21 Magnet School; in 1989, she was recognized by the Illinois
22 Congress of Parents and Teachers with an honorary life
23 membership in appreciation for her service to children and
24 youth; in 1997, she received the Booker T. Washington Award for

1 education; in recognition for her commitment to
2 humanities-based education, the Champaign Urbana Schools
3 Foundation established the Hester Suggs Endowment Fund to
4 provide grants that expand the Arts and Humanities for children
5 in Champaign Unit 4; she was also the recipient of "A Living
6 Legend" award from the Champaign County Section of the National
7 Council of Negro Women in 2012; and

8 WHEREAS, Hester Suggs was a lifelong member of the Gamma
9 Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc., serving four terms
10 as president for the graduate chapter of Epsilon Epsilon Omega
11 and as a graduate adviser to Gamma; in 1997, she was accorded
12 the designation of "Golden Soror" by the sorority; she was
13 honored for "extraordinary sisterhood and exemplary service"
14 to the chapter at the 2014 Centennial Celebration of the Gamma
15 Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha; in September of 2015, she
16 received the Winding Ivy Epsilon Epsilon Omega Living Legacy
17 Award in recognition of her dedication to Alpha Kappa Alpha;
18 and

19 WHEREAS, Hester Suggs served on the boards of the Community
20 Foundation of Champaign County, Mercy Hospital, the Girls Club,
21 and the Illini Rebounders; and

22 WHEREAS, Hester Suggs enjoyed cooking, arranging family
23 dinners, gardening, sewing, painting, and University of

1 Illinois football and basketball; and

2 WHEREAS, Hester Suggs was preceded in death by her husband,
3 Raymond; her parents; and her brothers, Cecil D. Nelson Jr. and
4 Earnest Nelson; and

5 WHEREAS, Hester Suggs is survived by her children, Barbara
6 Elaine (Frederick) Mason, Danny Jerome (Catherine), and Ramona
7 Gay (William) Winrow; her grandsons, William Winrow III, Mason
8 James Reinhart-Suggs, Justin Paul Winrow, Raymond Nelson
9 Winrow, Frederick Eugene Kwame Mason, Ryan Daniel Suggs, and
10 Logan Patrick Suggs; her sisters, Eleanor Conrad, Estelle
11 Merrifield, and Eunice Rivers; and many cousins, nieces,
12 nephews, extended family members, and friends; therefore, be it

13 RESOLVED, BY THE SENATE OF THE NINETY-NINTH GENERAL
14 ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF ILLINOIS, that we, along with her
15 family and friends, mourn the passing of Hester Barbara Nelson
16 Suggs; and be it further

17 RESOLVED, That a suitable copy of this resolution be
18 presented to the family of Hester Suggs as an expression of our
19 sympathy.